

What the Western Left Misses About Cuba

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The recent changes in Cuba are misunderstood by many western left commentators who, like other western pundits, are absorbed in the logic of western capital and pay little regard to Cuba's history of resistance.

So we see alarm bells ringing over 'the end of the Revolution', because a flood of US tourists and investors are arriving in the island. This will corrupt and destroy Cuban socialism, they claim. Some even posit a 'split' between Fidel and Raúl Castro. After all, Raúl was head of government when relations with the US began to be normalised, and now Fidel has [written](#) critically on the Obama visit - 'denounced' it, as was misreported by much of the US media.



Clearly, the change in US policy is not a marker of some sort of new-found affection for Cuban socialism on the part of Washington; rather, it is a recognition that the strategy of sanctions and isolation has been utterly unsuccessful in its bid to starve the Cuban masses into counter-revolution. As Barack Obama [put it](#) at the start of the normalisation process in late 2014: "These 50 years have shown that isolation has not worked. It's time for a new approach". The 'Plan B', to bury Cuba in consumer envy and 'American freedom', has always been around.

US regime change by 'isolation' has been an abysmal failure, just like the Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961; the string of assassination attempts on the Cuban leadership; the sponsorship of terrorist groups; and the pumping of anti-communist propaganda about and into the island. Now the western media misreports the US abandoning a blockade policy as Cuba 'opening up' to the world.

In fact, it was Cuba's relentless diplomacy at the UN and its 2013 presidency of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC: the 33 nation, 600 million person bloc which excludes the US and Canada), that catalysed Obama's December 2014 shift. He found the tables had been turned; the US was now isolated in the Americas.

US moves toward normalisation and dismantling the economic blockade represent, above all, a historic victory for Cuba. The failure of the policy of isolation is a tribute to the resilience, heroism and creativity of the Cuban people, combined with their determined and astute political leadership.

Remember, this was a unilateral concession by Washington. Cuba did not change its internal policies. There is no change in Cuba's 1995 Foreign Investment Law, created to facilitate joint ventures. Cuba's more recent economic reforms were driven by internal need, and began several years before the recent US policy change. The US wants some quid pro quo, but Cuba does not see 'normalisation' that way.

The position expressed by [Fidel many](#) decades ago and maintained by Raul today is simply this: the blockade must go. We have to live with our neighbours and some form of co-existence based on international law is both desirable and necessary. Many western leftists have not understood this.

It's a truism to say that imperialism never gives up its hostility to any socialist, progressive or independent country. There is an intractable conflict between an imperial power and any independent state. Cuban historians say this precedes the Revolution and that Washington has had its 'annexationist' eyes on Cuba for two centuries.

Despite this, Cuba never shut the door to relations with the US. It was Washington which imposed threats, sanctions, embargoes, destabilisation and aggression. Cuba owes the US nothing for abandoning these aggressions. Political normalisation and an end to the blockade (not to mention freedom for the Cuban Five) have been key demands of Cuba and its supporters for decades. It is foolish not to recognize the importance of this breakthrough.

Certainly, important questions remain: how will normalisation help the US to engage in counter-revolutionary activities? What will be the cultural impact? What controls must be maintained on foreign investors? These things are well known to a Cuban leadership which has been dealing with them for many years.

Nevertheless, Cuba is in need of capital, technology and management techniques from the more developed countries. For a relatively poor country with limited natural resources, the blockade makes meaningful economic development exceedingly difficult; it creates serious shortages of medicine, foodstuffs, raw materials, energy, industrial materials; it is a massive barrier to accessing modern technology and foreign capital. It also makes it difficult to develop foreign markets for Cuban produce, which in turn limits local industry (such as pharmaceuticals) and foreign exchange. Ending the blockade has always been a key Cuban objective. The country has never wanted isolation.

Havana is well placed to rise to the new challenges that 'normalisation' will bring. Its excellent relationships with Venezuela, Brazil, China and Russia help ensure that the US will not be able to dominate Cuba's system of controlled, joint-venture foreign investment. Its revolutionary leadership is experienced, principled, honest, vigilant, and with deep roots among the masses. They are alert to US plans. As Fidel says in his recent commentary:

"Nobody should be under the illusion that the people of this noble and selfless country will surrender their rights and spiritual wealth that they have won with the development of education, science and culture."

Cuba will survive the dangers of normalisation, using the same strengths with which it has been able to survive everything else its northern neighbour has thrown at it over the last 57 years. Normalisation with the US, far from capitulation, is a great victory. Cuba is not giving up a single principle. It is a testament to the endurance and heroism of the Cuban people.

¡Que viva Cuba!

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